

Market Your Health-focused Message Through Schools

by John Driscoll, Oct 06, 2010

With childhood obesity at an all-time high, it seems everyone these days, from celebrity chefs to first lady and mom Michelle Obama, is talking about the need to find ways at home and at school to help kids stay healthy and fit. As a result, moms, who make the majority of food and activity choices for their families, have never been more focused on making sure they choose healthy options.

But moms aren't the only ones deciding what their kids can and can't eat. Schools, where kids spend the majority of their time outside of home, are also stepping in and setting regulations on what kids are allowed to consume on school grounds. Many schools have already banned the sale of high-calorie, high-fat, and high-sodium snacks and beverages, and many are revamping their lunch programs dramatically to meet new dietary standards for school kids.

The one challenge facing both moms and schools in this joint effort to keep kids healthy, however, is actually getting kids to eat (and to want to eat) the "better for you" food options. For most kids, "good for you food" = "boring or yucky food mom makes me eat."

Consumer packaged goods brands, which have largely taken the heat for creating the products that fueled kids unhealthy eating habits in the first place, have made some strides in creating "better for you" products that also taste good and pass the scrutiny of both moms and schools. But if these brands really want to become champions of the "healthy kids cause," they need to find ways to connect with moms through their child's school that demonstrate and reinforce their brand's commitment to encouraging kids to make healthier choices.

Providing free product samples to moms at school as Mission Tortillas and Chiquita Bites have done this past year is one way. Giving coupons out at school events like family movie nights is another. Providing useful tools and tips to moms to help them get their kids on board with eating healthier and exercising regularly...such as the NFL Play 60 Program is currently doing, is yet another.

With a targeted offer and the right messaging and execution, a through-school marketing program can be one of the most effective ways to engage health-focused moms, create brand goodwill and build long-term brand loyalty.

Here's why:

- There's simply no other marketing option that is as targeted and contextual as promoting your brand or sampling your product to health-conscious moms at school, who are actively looking for ways to encourage their kids to make healthy choices.
- While manufactured brand buzz online certainly works on some levels, it's impossible to duplicate the natural and authentic brand endorsement that takes place between moms in person at school functions and events when they are keenly focused on their kids' health and well being, and uniquely receptive to the products and services that help them help their families thrive.
- Schools are not just revamping their lunch programs. They are making it a priority to educate kids and promote a healthier lifestyle, which means having fewer bake sales and more walkathons, offering healthy snack options during events and activities, using green products vs. chemical-based. If your brand can play a part in furthering this initiative, you'll earn the PR halo effect and brand goodwill that comes with supporting school community programs.

